

Washington, D.C. - Today, Congressman Joe Sestak (PA-07) voted for, and the House passed, HR 2510, the Absentee Ballot Track, Receive, and Confirm Act. The bill, which passed unanimously, directs the Election Assistance Commission (EAC) to make payments to reimburse states for the costs incurred in establishing, if the state so chooses, an absentee ballot tracking program for federal elections.

"I was proud to co-sponsor this vital piece of legislation. Fair elections are the cornerstone of our democracy and those who vote by absentee ballot should have every confidence that their vote is actually counted," said Congressman Sestak. "This holds especially true for the members of our armed forces, who lay their lives on the line for our Nation and should be guaranteed that their votes are tallied," the Congressman continued. "Studies by the federal Election Assistance Commission and the Pew Center on the States have found that in the 2006 federal elections, only about 30 percent of overseas military ballots were counted. This legislation strives to create an additional layer of accountability for absentee ballots, and is vital to the integrity of our electoral process."

An absentee ballot tracking system established under the provisions of the bill (which amends the Help America Vote Act of 2002) will allow voters to easily find out, online or through an automated phone system, whether an elections office has sent out a ballot, whether a completed ballot has arrived back at the registrar's office and whether the ballot was actually counted.

This is the latest of a series of initiatives Congressman Sestak has supported to improve the ballot delivery process for federal elections. In June, the Congressman voted for HR 2647, the FY 2010 National Defense Authorization Act, which contained language which would establish an Overseas Voting Advisory Board that would conduct studies, issue reports, and have hearings on the abilities and obstacles to overseas voting, the successes and failures of the Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) under the Department of Defense, and any administration efforts to increase overseas voter participation.

Additionally, he co-sponsored HR 1604, the Universal Right to Vote by Mail Act of 2009, which amends the Help America Vote Act to prohibit a state from imposing additional conditions or requirements on the eligibility of an individual to cast a vote in federal elections by mail, except to the extent that it imposes a deadline for requesting the ballot and returning it to the appropriate state or local election official.

*Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including as Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of "Deep Blue," the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the "Global War on Terrorism." He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to the U.S. Congress.*